

TOP SECRET

7 February 1965

DRAFT DCI BRIEFING FOR THE
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

VIETNAM

- I. Secretary McNamara alluded yesterday to intelligence information providing the rationale for our retaliation against North Vietnam after the Viet Cong attacks on American installations in South Vietnam, and specifically for the choice of Dong Hoi as the target area. I propose to begin this morning by giving you some of that intelligence.

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- B. Weapons of Chinese or Soviet origin, captured from the Viet Cong in South Vietnam, have clearly come from North Vietnam by sea or over the infiltration trails in Laos.

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C. Cumulative infiltration of manpower, virtually all of them military specialists, from North Vietnam to the Viet Cong amounted to about 34,000 through October of last year, according to our best available evidence. In the first nine months of 1964, most of the men were North Vietnamese, according to prisoner interrogations. In contrast to previous years, when the infiltrates were mainly men who had been born in the South, these men were born in the North, and had been drafted into the North Vietnamese army before they were sent to join the Viet Cong. I will go into more detail on infiltration later.

D. I mention it now to note that the South Vietnamese military have been claiming for about a year that the capture of these northerners proves the presence of North Vietnamese regular army formations in South Vietnam.

1. We have not considered this sufficient evidence for such a conclusion, but we have other evidence which traces directly to Dong Hoi.

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(MAP, 325th Division Suspect Outstations)

E. Dong Hoi has been the headquarters for the North Vietnamese 325th Division.

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[REDACTED] headquarters element had apparently moved to a point in Laos near the South Vietnamese border, south of the demarcation line. We have had other evidence that at least a regiment of North Vietnamese troops is stationed in this area to provide security for the infiltration trails. We

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You will note that this in turn is near the Pleiku area, where the American installations were attacked Saturday morning.

- G. This whole northern area of South Vietnam has become a focus of increasing concern. While most of the dramatic military actions have been around Saigon and farther south in the delta region, there has been a substantial build-up of Communist forces in the four

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northernmost provinces, extending from just north of Quang Ngai on the map up to the 17th parallel. Main force strength of the Viet Cong in this area has risen from 7,000 to more than 12,000 in the past 12 months.

(MAP, February 7 Air Strike Targets)

II. This is the background which makes the North Vietnamese military barracks at Dong Hoi and others near the demarcation line a logical retaliation target.

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A. Of the barracks shown on the map, only Dong Hoi was hit Sunday, because of cloud cover.

1. The South Vietnamese Air Force has been authorized to hit the Chap Le or Vu Con barracks today, or any other suitable targets in the area as weather allows. No American air strikes are scheduled, but US forces have been authorized to give tactical support to the South Vietnamese for today's operations. The forecast indicated marginal weather over the target area.

B. Our reconnaissance planes were over Dong Hoi at first light Monday--about seven o'clock last night Washington time.

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III. The pilots who attacked Dong Hoi reported light to heavy anti-aircraft fire, some of it coming from North Vietnamese gunboats in a river near the target.

A. As far as we can determine, there was no Communist air reaction to the raid, although we know that Communist radar tracked our aircraft from shortly after their launch from the carriers until they had all left North Vietnamese territory.

B. During the attack, North Vietnamese naval units in the southern sector were placed on the highest level of alert. A subsequent message said several targets including Dong Hoi were under attack, and ordered North Vietnamese naval units to shoot down any intruding aircraft.

1. Twelve hours after the attack, our only indication of Communist air reaction was a schedule for 15 fighters from Phuc Yen, the field near Hanoi, to patrol areas within a 100-mile radius of the field a full 24 hours after the attack on Dong Hoi.

2. A message from Peiping late Sunday night asked for weather forecasts, starting Monday evening, for two military airfields in South China. Such requests in the past

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IV. Last August, after our reprisal air strikes for the gunboat attacks on US destroyers, Communist China almost immediately deployed a regiment of jet fighters to Phuc Yen airfield and began training North Vietnamese to fly them. There had already apparently been some prior training of North Vietnamese in the Soviet Union.

- A. This regiment was subsequently increased to 53 aircraft, MIG-15s and 17s.
- B. Meanwhile the Chinese have increased their own jet fighter strength on South Chinese airfields from about 150 to more than 350, including some MIG-19s and a few MIG-21s. At least one new airbase has been built, and small ones enlarged.
- C. This air defense build-up has been accompanied by a concomitant increase in North Vietnam of antiaircraft and radar installations, including the latest Chinese types of early warning and ground-controlled-intercept radars. We have also seen a few Soviet antiaircraft guns around Hanoi of a type which we have not yet observed in China.
- D. There has been no significant reinforcement of Chinese ground forces in this area, but Peiping already has about 185,000 troops within 200 miles of the border which can move south on short notice.

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E. The navy is the weakest element in Chinese Communist military power. Communist naval preparations in recent months have been limited to the deployment of additional patrol craft and torpedo boats to southern waters, where they could undertake limited action against US naval patrols in the Tonkin Gulf.

(light on) V. Peiping is in a position to turn up the heat in Southeast Asia with little or no warning. The Chinese Communists are probably determined to continue their support of the Communist insurgencies in Vietnam and Laos, and we think they would probably meet a limited escalation of the war with military countermoves.

A. It was our conclusion before the weekend, however, and it still is, that the Chinese moves we have seen, and the militant propaganda accompanying them, are primarily a bluff to deter the United States from enlarging the war.

B. In this objective, we think the Chinese and the Soviet Communists are probably working toward the same end, but probably not together.

C. Soviet Premier Kosygin stopped in Peiping overnight on his way to Hanoi. He had talks with Chinese Premier Chou En-lai and Foreign Minister Chen Yi, but not with Mao--which accords with protocol. (Mao equates with Brezhnev as head of the party)

1. Kosygin may have suggested some slightly altered ground rules for the March meeting of Communist parties called by the Soviets and opposed by the Chinese.
2. We have no indication, however, that any fundamental change in Sino-Soviet relations was achieved or even proposed during the overnight stay.

D. Kosygin was in Hanoi at the time of the US attack on Dong Hoi. The only reference to his movements was an announcement that he had talked with Vietnamese leaders Sunday.

1. Kosygin is leading a high-level delegation of military and economic officials. We think this is a Soviet attempt to regain influence with the North Vietnamese at the expense of the Chinese. They are probably counting on the historical antipathy between the Chinese and the Vietnamese, and possibly on Ho Chi Minh's old Moscow background.

2. To achieve their objectives, the Soviets will have to make some commitments of increased support to the North Vietnamese, but at the same time they will be trying to dissuade Hanoi from any course of action which might bring the Soviets into a confrontation with the United States.
3. Moscow probably hopes the demonstrative Kosygin visit to Hanoi will help deter the United States from taking any steps to enlarge the war. We expect they will try to preclude any damage to their continuing efforts for an East-West detente by assuring us that their military aid will be confined to defensive weapons--which could include fighter aircraft and surface-to-air missiles.

VI. This still leaves the question of the reason for the Viet Cong attacks on the US installations in South Vietnam. The North Vietnamese may have been emboldened by the promises implicit in Kosygin's visit, and may even have estimated that if the US did retaliate while Kosygin was in Hanoi, the USSR would be even further involved.

A. It is usual for the Viet Cong to hit hard after the truce they observe for the Lunar New Year,

and to them the Pleiku installations with their aircraft are not only targets of very high military importance, but targets of high vulnerability to guerrilla attack.

B. Hanoi, noting the presence of Kosygin in the North and Mr. Bundy in the South, may have estimated that combining a new heavy attack on American forces with the political crisis in Saigon and the Soviet courtship in Hanoi could substantially advance the Communist cause. They may believe that the United States is discouraged over the loss of American lives on behalf of an unstable and floundering regime in Saigon.

VII. If the Communists now mount more heavy attacks on US forces in South Vietnam or significantly increase pressures elsewhere -- for instance, by seizing some of the Mekong River towns in Laos -- that would be a clear signal that the Communists themselves are looking for escalation.

A. We believe, however, that except for political and propaganda moves, the Communists will be cautious in their reaction to the Dong Hoi strike.

1. There is, of course, the danger of their misreading our resolve. They might continue attacks on our forces, for instance,

if they were to read the withdrawal of
US dependents as a sign of a Washington
decision to negotiate a political and
military withdrawal from South Vietnam.

B. On balance, however, we believe that the
Communists remain concerned to avoid
escalation, and will pay heed to further
military demonstrations of US preparedness
and willingness to escalate the conflict
if necessary.

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So far, I have been dealing with the problem of
the immediate moment. I think we should now turn to
the basic and continuing problem of South Vietnam
itself.

(Foregoing eliminates all of Section X in SVN briefing
(on pages 12-15)

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